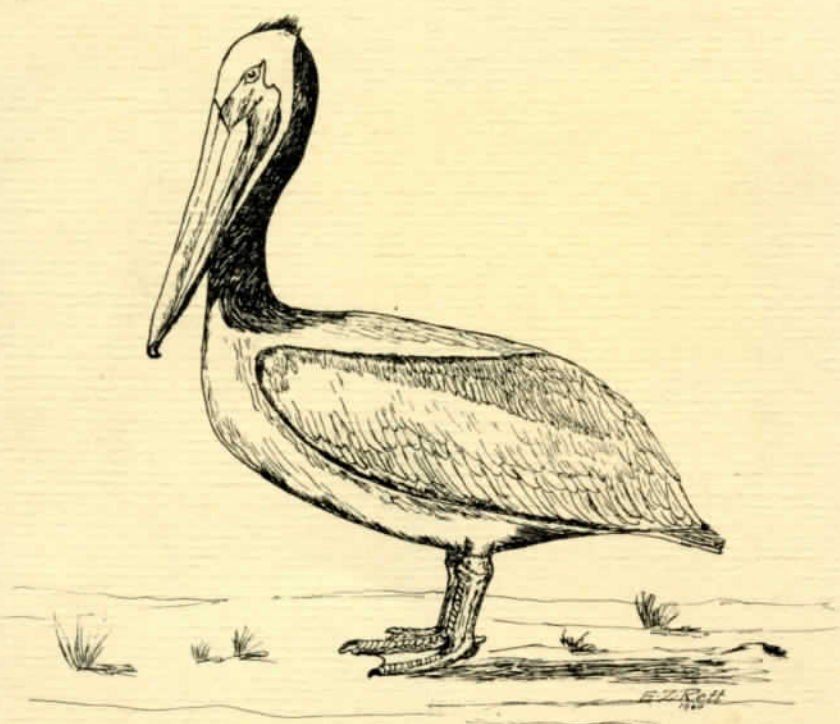


NOTICIAS

Santa Barbara Historical Society



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Isabel More Austin—1864-1941

By CAMILLA WATERMAN AUSTIN

Artistic talent is born. It is absolutely lovely and always elusive and refreshing.

Belle More Austin had more than her share of it.

She was the daughter of John J. More and Miriam Hickox More, who were among the early pioneers to come to Santa Barbara from Akron, Ohio. The Mores lived in the old homestead at Santa Barbara and Arrellaga Streets, where they divided their time between the old More Ranch, known as More's Landing, and Santa Rosa Island, which for years was a family possession. It was the days of horses and carriages, and most "Barberenos" rode horseback about town and out to the ranches. This was the only transportation, and there was no paving on any of the city streets. Four generations met for meals in the old homestead—the great grandparents, grandparents, parents, and three sons and Aunt (Miriam More). When visiting friends arrived, fourteen or more for dinner was not uncommon.

Belle More, as she was called, soon showed her artistic and literary interests. In High School, in the old San Marcos Building, she early developed a dream of college, which, at that time on the Pacific Coast, meant Mills College, then a seminary for Girls in Oakland. During her years there, under the leadership of its founder, Mrs. Mills, my mother-in-law's delight was found in imaginative literature and the arts. In the former, she wrote stories for children that appeared in the "Youth's Companion" and "St. Nicholas;" and in the latter she discovered the creative joy of painting in water-colors.

It was some years after her graduation in one of the first classes of Mills College, and after her marriage to Charles Perry Austin, of New York, that she turned to her first love of sketching and painting. At first, it was water-colors of landscapes and still life. Later, she, with an old friend, Mrs. "Billy" Burton, worked together on a new fad which swept over the country, designs and decorations on burnt leather. Then came the tooled leather so treasured by the Spaniards on their handsome saddles. This medium seemed so inadequate and lacking inspiration! Then the great discovery came—it was to add color to the leather with its tooled design. So Belle More made the experiment, even as the Florentine artists did centuries before.

Fitting up a room built onto the old wood shed as a studio, its walls were soon covered by pieces of old illuminated leather brought from Italy in soft and brilliant colors the Italians excelled in using to emphasize their beautiful designs. Soon long tables were covered with well tanned hides on which patterns from the Old World were carefully traced with the imported tools used by the workers in leather in Italy, and tubes of paints and varnishes from France. Then, alone in her studio, she braved the task of hammering out the designs on the large hides which had been carefully softened with warm water and dried. Three and four panel screens, chests, and bookends became alive with color. Peacocks of brilliant hue, wild flowers, musical lyres, and family crests adorned these works of art.

A screen was specially designed for the Pacific Union Club of San Francisco, a screen and paneling for Mrs. Phoebe Hearst's dining room in



A Castilian Coat of Arms (By Isabel More Austin)

Pleasanton, and the same for Mrs. Clinton Hale in Santa Barbara—this last mentioned screen is now at Mrs. Lawrence More's home in Montecito. A screen made for Mrs. Frederick Gould now is in the beautiful dining-room at the Lennart Palme's residence. Other screens were made, one for the Harrison Gray Otis family, of Los Angeles, and several for the Edwin Gledhills, in payment for their lovely photographs of her family. She made, also, screens for her three sons, Perry, Winthrop, and Jack—the last is now in the home of Mrs. Walter Briggs.

The chests for children were charmingly designed with nursery rhymes, and the bookends with family coat of arms.

Mr. Reginald Johnson, the architect of the Montecito Biltmore Hotel, had Mrs. Austin design the coat of arms of Castile for him. This colorful work, after all these years, still distinguishes the library of the Hotel.

Three beautiful "Books of Memory," with the seal of the Diocese of Los Angeles on them, were placed in St. Paul's Cathedral, in Los Angeles, in St. Luke's Church, in Long Beach, and for the "Good Samaritan Hospital" Memorial Bed.

Although her husband had gone back and forth to Europe many times, it was not until late in life that Belle More at last went to Italy and saw for herself that she had discovered the secret of the Renaissance artists. Her tubes of oil paint, her brushes, and her tools, she had imported from France; but it was her talent and inspiration, worked out in her improvised studio in Santa Barbara, that had brought her distinguished work to completion.

CAMILLA WATERMAN AUSTIN

El Vaquero Viejo

By CLIFFORD McELRATH

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I first saw Joe Espinosa or Old Joe or El Viejo as he was variously called when I was cattle boss and bronc rider for the Santa Cruz Island Co. shortly after World War I. Joe had worked for the Island Co. for many years but before I came to the island he had had a run-in with the superintendent and had been let go.

Jose was an old Spanish vaquero past 80 years old; he did not know his exact age, but he had been born a subject of Mexico in Santa Barbara and had seen Fremont raise the first American flag in that town, had roped Grizzly bears for the bull and bear fights, knew Joaquin Murrietta, Three Finger Jack and Vasquez, and had driven cattle from Los Angeles to San Francisco many times.

Jose was camped at Campo Chino about two or three miles from Prisoners Harbor fishing crawfish for a living. In getting into his skiff he dragged his 30-30 in by the muzzle. The bullet took the first joint off of two of his fingers, glanced around a rib and lodged under the skin on his back.

He wrapped the stumps of his fingers in a bandana handkerchief and rowed all the way to Prisoners Harbor. His reason was that he couldn't reach the bullet to cut it out and wanted someone to do it for him. He was quite disgusted and considered us all a bunch of sissies when we refused to